Sermon Series: Live in Liberty (week 16)
“Carrying Each Other’s Burdens” (Galatians 6:1-10) (10.1.17)
Galatians 6:1–10 (NIV84)

6 Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently. But watch yourself, or you also may be tempted. 2 Carry each other’s burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ. 3 If anyone thinks he is something when he is nothing, he deceives himself. 4 Each one should test his own actions. Then he can take pride in himself, without comparing himself to somebody else, 5 for each one should carry his own load.
6 Anyone who receives instruction in the word must share all good things with his instructor.
7 Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows. 8 The one who sows to please his sinful nature, from that nature will reap destruction; the one who sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life. 9 Let us not become weary in doing good, for (at the proper time we will reap a harvest) IF WE DO NOT GIVE UP. 10 Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers.

The word of God for the people of God.
Title: “Carrying Each Other’s Burdens”
LET US PRAY.

INTRODUCTION:

Puritan preacher Richard Baxter once said about the centrality of preaching, “Our work requires greater skill, and especially greater life and zeal than any of us can bring to it. It is no small matter to stand up in the face of a congregation, and to deliver a message of salvation or damnation, as from the living God, in the name of the Redeemer.” The message of the living God has the ability to tip our nicely ordered church communities upside down. So where preaching wanes in the church, the church becomes sick and dies. Where the Word of God is NOT rending and binding hearts, the church becomes just another community organization. My brothers and sisters, we are not just another community organization. We are the Body of Christ. We are the sons and daughters of the Living God. We are in communion with each other and our Savior Jesus. This requires compassion, collaboration, connection, coordination, and communication. This requires us to Carry Each Other’s Burdens.

BODY:

Paul describes here in this 6th chapter of Galatians what being a follower of Jesus Christ looks like. What is unmistakable is a Christian is connected; we are not isolated islands. We have a life in God the Spirit that compels us as Christians to be a community. Our identity in Christ is a chord of three strands: 1) Our individuality. 2) Our place in the Body of Christ. 3) God the Holy Spirit living within us. A note about this third strand: you have heard the scripture that says we are not to quench the Spirit. When we submit and not subvert the Holy Spirit, the strands of self and connection are stronger than they could ever be if they are independent of God.

This week, during premarital counseling, I shared this verse from Ecclesiastes 4:12 (NIV84) with the couple.

12 Though one may be overpowered, two can defend themselves.
A cord of three strands is not quickly broken.
Let us examine this Christian living that Paul describes. Then near the end I will share a personal experience where this Christian living was evident.
Inevitably, we will all stumble, get tripped up, or fall back. This should keep us humble and
remind us how we need each other. We are to come alongside; we are to restore our brother and sister gently, gently. Probably, this does not include the phrase "I told you so."
There is a warning not to be caught in the trap yourself. A good illustration comes from 12 step programs like AA. A newbie is paired with a sponsor. In fact, there is a 32 page brochure that explains the role of a sponsor. The sponsor may show up in a bar to support a struggling sponsoree, but clearly they must guard against falling into drink themselves.
Verse 2 is the title verse—Carry each other’s burdens. It is a fact of life that we all have burdens. Thankfully, we don’t always have full loads at the same time. Although, in situations like Puerto Rico, a whole people is burdened and needs large scale assistance.
A woman came through the Prayer Booth this week. She had come through more than a year ago when she was still displaced from her home damaged in Superstorm Sandy. I had prayed with her about those challenges back then. Her family is now back in their home. She stopped to ask for Bibles to put in relief boxes that she and friends are assembling. They are attempting to set up an alternative channel of support as quickly as possible with people they know in Maunabo, PR. I gave her English Pocket Testaments, Spanish Pocket Testaments, and some of the same Life Books I gave to the children last week.
This woman was thankful for the helping hand she had received, though it was a long and stressful hardship. Now, she was carrying another’s burdens. Yes, we are in relationship; we are connected.
Why do you suppose we have burdens? Might it be to make clear our need for God? Might it be to make clear our need for each other? Notice that we are to carry EACH OTHER’S burdens (plural). It is mutual support.
There are all kinds of burdens. Certainly this specific context uses as a starting point, helping people deal with sin. But, Paul develops and expands it broadly to “doing GOOD to all people.” In addition to hurricane Maria, our own nation had Irma, Harvey, and wild fires in the west. We have tragic killings in churches, schools, and inner-city Chicago is like a war zone. Cancer, disease, birth defects, and all sorts of sickness befall us. There is emotional trauma and mental illness. A broken economy leads to unemployment, home foreclosures, and crippling financial hardships. A variety of addictions can drag down whole families. Yes, in this life we will have trouble. So, how can Jesus say take heart, I have overcome the world?
Paul tells us that when we carry each other’s burdens, we are fulfilling the law of Christ. What law is that? Matthew 22:37–39 (NIV84) 37 Jesus replied: “ ’Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ 38 This is the first and greatest commandment. 39 And the second is like it: ’Love your neighbor as yourself.’
And in John 15:13 (NIV84) Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends.
Paul’s next point is for us to have a realistic understanding of our personal position in the Lord. From his warning, it is clear that this is a problem area for most of us. We tend to think better of ourselves than we should. We look around and find others that make us look good by comparison. Be careful and do not deceive yourself.
A business owner must examine the books. Anyone who does not is in danger of failing. Some businesses keep two sets of books. One shows the truth of the situation and the other is intended to fool the IRS or some other overseer. Unfortunately, too many people look at the dummy account of their lives and fool themselves.
Know yourself. Are you making progress on your pilgrim journey? You are not to compare yourself to the failing friend or the spiritual superstar. Do you see more of Jesus in your thinking
and acting? If yes, you can take pride in yourself. This is a healthy pride in godly attributes; not a self-righteousness or a pride that is over and against your neighbor.

Paul completes this thought with “each one should carry his own load.” Does this contradict the edict to carry each other’s burdens? No. Both need to be embraced. This ensures that a person does not take undue advantage of another. Oh, the scripture says you should help me. But brother, that same scripture says we are also to carry our own load. Paul is teaching healthy support among the family of faith; not, debilitating dependency.

And, there is a difference in the words burden and load. This word load was referring to a soldier’s pack. Each soldier had their own pack to carry. As believers, we have each been given a spiritual gift for the edification of the Body of Christ: A variety of gifts to be exercised by different people. You may be the only person with your particular gift. How could we expect someone else to carry your load?

As this verse is addressing self-examination too, it is likely referring to our giving an accounting to our Creator. No one else will be able to stand in our place at our judgment. Also, think about this. Jesus said, that we are to take up our cross and carry it daily. OUR cross, our load. We are not to carry anyone else’s cross and they cannot carry ours.

For the sake of time, I have just a couple remarks about the next few verses. Paul reminds us that we are in reciprocating relationships, which includes teachers and preachers of God’s word: “sharing all good things.”

Then we are given rules of the harvest. Some people, while they won’t say it out loud, believe they can fool God. I’ll just show God those dummy books. We have two fields to choose from: the sinful nature and the Spiritual realm. The first leads to a crop of corruption and the second a blessing of a kingdom life.

Maybe you are already trying to live such a kingdom life. And for a season, you are able to sustain it. Have you become weary of doing good? You think, people don’t appreciate it. It doesn’t seem to be making any difference. Possibly, you are just wearing down. Paul gives us encouragement and says do not grow weary. In God’s timing the right harvest will happen. God’s ways are higher than our ways and we need to trust that our sovereign God is in control. His plans will not be thwarted: “if we do not give up.”

No friends, do not give up. Do not quit. Persevere. Recently, I read an article about success and the characteristics that make a person successful. The research identified the critical ingredient as grit. Yes grit. This is the drive to continue when circumstances, people, and the enemy give you every reason to accept defeat. DO NOT become weary of doing good.

As we have opportunity, let us do good to all people. Paul doesn’t say as long as it is opportune, as long as it is convenient, do good to all people. He says as long as you have opportunity. When is that? You have opportunity as long as you are taking breath in and breathing it out. Friday, I failed at this. Afterwards, I felt like the priest in the Good Samaritan story who crossed the street because he had more important things to do than help the poor beaten Samaritan. I was on 4th Ave. in Galloway and a woman tried to flag me down. My front seat was filled and the back seats were folded down. I was on my way to the old house and then coming here to Emmaus to do the Prayer Booth. After I did my chores at the old house and was on my way here, I saw the woman again. She was beside two cars and an old man was struggling with a gas can. I missed the opportunity to do good to all people.

Paul tells us that all those that belong to the family of believers are special. When it comes to our brothers and sisters in Christ, we are to take it to another level.

1 Corinthians 12:25–26 (NIV84)

25 so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern
for each other. 26 If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it.

CONCLUSION:
Here is my personal experience that highlights several elements of this scripture. You may remember me speaking about Rob Taclan. I first met him at the Stockton Christian Fellowship when he shared his testimony about facing the enemy. He faced the enemy as an army officer and he faced the enemy when he and his wife Michele suffered through the loss of their infant daughter Natalie. He also shared some of that testimony last fall when he came here for a men’s breakfast.

At one point, I asked you to pray for Rob and Michele when they discovered they were pregnant again. Part of their journey had been sharing their struggle on Facebook with people all over the world. Several weeks ago, I went on FB to check on how they were doing; but, Rob had taken down his FB page. Carol & I prayed for them and their unborn baby on occasion.

A couple more weeks went by and I felt compelled to reach out to them. When I called, he explained that he couldn’t talk because it was the one year anniversary of Natalie’s death and they were tied up. We continued to pray for them and their unborn child.

A few more weeks go by. Two Wednesdays ago, Rob calls me. He asks, what made me call that particular day. I just explained that they had been on by heart and it must have been the Holy Spirit that led me to call him that day.

When he asked me what was going on with me, I told him we were moving on Saturday. He asked if we needed help and I said yes. Rob thought maybe he could ask a couple other people to help and I said I would appreciate any help I could get. In later texting, he said there were three of them that would help, possibly another three, and they would be there by 7 AM. I explained that I couldn’t pick up the truck until 7 and I didn’t know how long that would take.

I was at U-Haul at 6:59 waiting for the doors to open. Fred, who I had never met, was just buttoning up his shirt when he unlocked the doors and waved me in. He explained that he had been up most of night with his grandfather who was deteriorating rapidly. There was something within me whispering that I should offer to pray for them both; but, I was conflicted because I knew that Rob had decided he would be at the house at 7:30. So, I did not pray with/for Fred and his grandfather.

When I arrived home at 7:20 Rob was there already along with about eight other people-mostly Pastor Jeff’s adult children. He is the pastor at Trinity Alliance. I knew one of his daughters from Stockton Christian Fellowship, but none of the others. People I did not even know had shown up to help me move. Trust me, there was a lot of burden carrying happening.

Pastor Mike from HCC helped. Zack, Paige’s brother helped. My son and his family helped. A couple we are friends with helped. Other than my family, people could not help all day, but they pitched in as long as they could. Carol and I felt so blessed that so many helped carry our burden. After living in our home 17 years, there were a lot of things to move and the Christian community gathered around us.

In the days that followed, I thought of Fred and prayed for him and his grandfather. When someone starts talking to you about the end stages of life, you know that God is working in their heart. One afternoon I stopped by U-Haul, but Fred was not there. On Friday morning, after a couple attempts, I finally reached Fred by phone. I asked how his grandfather William was doing. William did not want to eat any more, just sleep. I told Fred I had been praying for them and asked if he had a church family. He said no. I wanted to drop off my card in case there was some need I could meet. He was very receptive. On my way home from the Prayer Booth, I dropped off my card attached to a Pocket Testament.
My friends, there are all kinds of burdens. There are spiritual burdens and there are physical burdens. Won’t you carry each other’s burdens?
Colossians 3:12 (NIV84)
12 Therefore, as God’s chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience.
Amen and amen. Let us pray.